SIGNAL TO NOISE #50

8. JAY CLARKSON
10. FEUERMUSIK
12. NORMAL LOVE
14. ELLEN ALLIEN

16. AUSTRALIAN EAI
22. WFMU
30. OUR FAVORITE THINGS

44. LIVE REVIEWS
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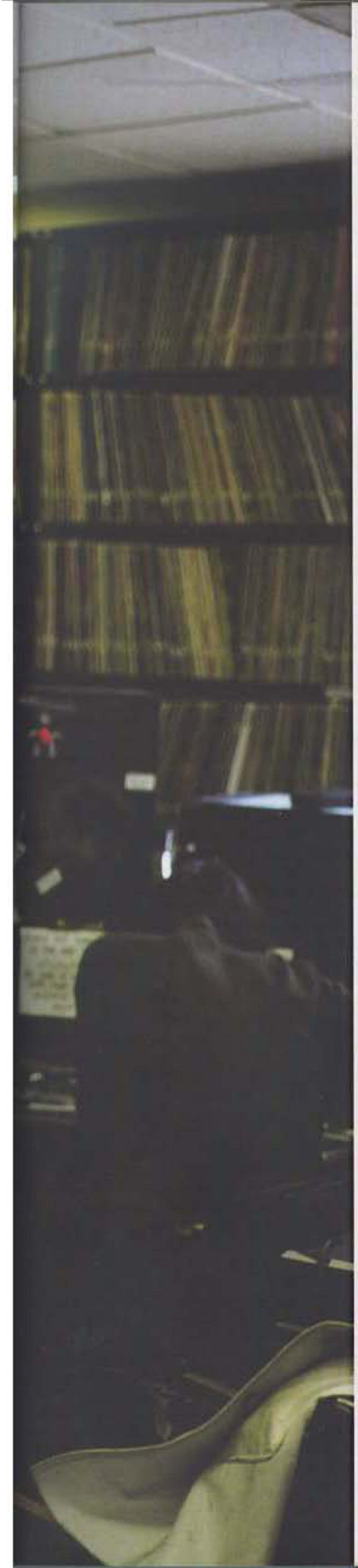
WFMU music director Brian Turner in Jersey City, April 2008
Photo by Caroline Bell

THE SPIRIT OF RADIO

Jesse Jarnow goes behind the scenes at New Jersey's left-of-the-dial home for progressive and unusual music. Photos by Caroline Bell.



The man in the Hoboken bar is shirtless, glazed gold, and wearing a crown made of a record. As if he's the victim of some unspeakable trauma, his hair (where it pokes through the paint) is white, though his face is miraculously unwrinkled. He wears a sash that reads "freeform."

He slips on a pair of headphones and sits back down at the mic. Nobody, least of all Ken Freedman himself, seems bothered by the fact that, on the radio, nobody can see you glazed gold. In fact, despite the other DJs slumped and nursing beers against the wall of Maxwell's glassed-in former smoking section, everybody seems pretty happy about it.

Diners and bartenders peering at the WFMU station manager from the restaurant cannot hear a word he says, though they can probably guess. Likely, Freedman—the primary force behind the New Jersey radio station since 1985—is invoking FMU's 50th anniversary, the one million dollar goal for this year's fundraising marathon that they are still $65,000 short of meeting, the four-and-a-half dwindling hours they have left to meet it, and (of course) that number again, 800-989-9368.

Also wearing gold is sonorous voiced DJ Gaylord Fields, decked in a kimono with a bowtie beneath. "Hi there, nice to be with you, happy you could stick around," Fields says, once the on-air signal has been switched to the back room and he has taken the stage. "I'd like to introduce Legs 'Larry' Smith, drums..." Evan "Funk" Davies strikes up a beat.

On a landing of the spiral stairs that lead to WFMU's office—which occupies the top and-a-half of the four-and-a-half floor building they own in downtown Jersey City—a papier-mâché unicorn grazes amid a field of kitsch. There are James Brown bobbleheads, a dancing hula girl, a Homer Simpson doll, a rubber ducky, a classic Gladys Goose lamp, a Gene Simmons bust (topped by either a fez or a lampshade), and a few dozen other objects that nobody can hear on the radio, either.

What they *can* hear on the radio, though, as well as W-F-M-U-dot-o-r-g—where half of its 200,000 monthly listeners tune in—is a bit more indefinable. One way to listen to the self-described "freeform station of the nation" is to tune in until you hear something familiar; then, turn it off. The simple game can last hours. And, depending on the DJs, perhaps days.

"All the best black metal is French language these days," a jock might opine, briefly praising the thriving "black ambient and black metal" scene in Montreal before cuing up some resolutely sublime and abstract Japanese jazz from the PSF label.

With a yearly pledge drive and twice-annual Manhattan record fairs that come around like seasons, frequent live session stopovers by touring art-rock outfits, and a blog that manages to stay completely unique in a well-repeated blogosphere, WFMU has—in the age of satellite radio and mass media overload—established itself as an institution, and a vital one. Along with stores like Manhattan's Other Music and San Francisco's Aquarius Records, distributors like Forced Exposure, labels like Matador and Merge, and one-band cottage industries like the Sun City Girls, WFMU remains a powerful node in the post-punk/pre-cyberweb network of genuinely independent operations within the vaster culture industries.

Where digi-outlets like *Pitchfork* and *Stereogum* have had a hand in defining contemporary taste—and initiating a post-indie/mainstream singularity, taboot—WFMU retains a connection to a much deeper, richer vein of hipness.

They call it "freeform," a name which implies a certain degree of anti-authoritarianism, as well as a connection to the phrase's utopian hippie roots—and WFMU at age 50 shows a good deal of both—but it has come to mean something even more specific. Taking the opposite tack from Manhattan liberal staple WBAI, whose model of community radio has factionalized the station beyond usefulness, station manager Freedman and music director Brian Turner have sought something more important: that the very notion of freeform (which, is to say, truly open-eared utopia) be present in the selections of each and every DJ, even if they do seem to be mostly white 30- or-40somethings operating with an excess of cultural capital and a decided lack of funds.

"When I was first starting, I would hear shows that I didn't know much about," says Turner, who has programmed the station since 1996. "There [were] a lot of contemporary electronic music shows that I [wasn't] completely up on and I would learn so much about it because it was in the freeform context, where [somebody might] draw a line between something unfamiliar and something familiar.

WFMU's Scott Williams, Irwin Chausid, Brian Turner and Liz Berg in Jersey City, NJ, April 2008

Like, I would learn about Autechre via King Tubby and go 'oh, that's where it connects, I understand.'"

Resisting the urge to program specialty blocks, Turner says, "it took a really long time to get a good hip-hop show because people would come at me with, like, 'well, freeform means I will play Biz Markie and maybe some Curtis Mayfield and Funkadelic.' And that would be two sides of the same coin, but I really wanted people to understand that the function of the station was to connect the outside parameters that genres of music dwelled within."

WFMU's strength is a still a matter of taste, of course (and insane, eclectic taste, at that), but it is less about branding and more about a mapping of territories. After all, somebody needs to know where the best French black metal is going down. But in a format that exists 24 hours a day, seven days a week, there is a room for multitudes—a standing army of music, as it were—and there are times when it is less like a mapping and more like the territory itself.

"Invariably they are mid-set on some far out wavelength," Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo wrote in a 2000 appreciation, approximating what it's like to tune in to the station's tower in East Orange. "One manic jam leads into the next, and before I know it i've driven halfway across the city and up out onto the highway. Now at this point one of two things happens: either I go out of range before the jock comes back on to tell me what amazing stuff I've been hearing, OR s/he comes back and then doesn't tell anyway!!! Goes off on some other great tangent, maybe announced b4 the set, who knows?

"Now of course, I exaggerate," Ranaldo continues. "Often the djs will reveal to us what great stuff we've been listening to, but invariably there is one side—at least one side—per show that you simply MUST know more deeply, MUST have in yr library. And yet… you never will… Becuz the music will shift again and some amazing fragment that you had just swallowed whole will blow off forever into the air, even as it's still exploding in the back of yr cortex. And oft times you'll never hear it again. Ever. And you know what? It's fitting and pure and beautiful that way after all, isn't it? The music you heard became an actual experience, joining the endless log of musics and lived reality in yr head, and escaped for once morphing into A PRODUCT."

Which perhaps explains why the WFMU offices are so overrun with ephemera, each telescoping into in-joke footnotes in the station's clubhouse-like history. It is, after all, hardly limited to the tiny landing by the stairs. There is also the matter of the hallway full of Freedman's collection of velvet paintings (Jesus and Elvis together! Osama bin Laden!), altered record jackets (Simon and Garfunkel's Bookends, pupils replaced with googly eyes), a skylight painted by Clean drummer Hamish Kilgour, the Bob Dylan Death DAT (prepared by Freedman, Andy Breckman, and "listeners lamenting the fact that Dylan has died," and encased in fire alarm glass, to be broken when needed. Dylan's management declined Turner's request for Dylan to record an "I'm Bob Dylan and I'm dead now" tag), propaganda posters (again, Freedman's), signs lifted from the Upsala College campus that birthed the station ("Dr. F.M. Love," hangs on a studio door—Freedman doesn't know what he taught), and—of course—the music, which is concentrated in (but hardly limited to) their massive second floor library.

The "U" in WFMU belongs to Upsala College, courtesy of the Swedish-American Augustana Synod, who helped found the school in Brooklyn in 1893. By the time FM Upsala went on the air in 1958 with a 10-watt signal, the school had moved first to Kenilworth, New Jersey and, in 1924, East Orange, some 15 miles west of Manhattan.

For its first decade, WFMU hummed along like a pleasant radio station at a pleasant Lutheran university, broadcasting six hours a day, five days a week. At least until November 1967, when an Upsala student named Vin Scelsa was able to secure an all-night Saturday slot, in Scelsa's words, "without really anyone's permission." Following a brief detour during which they broadcast classes ("we developed this whole theory that people would rather think that they were being entertained, rather than think that they were being educated"), WFMU went officially freeform in the spring of 1968. The first fundraising marathon—$3,000, so the station could stay on the air during summer vacation—followed immediately.

"Free form essentially means breaking down the boundaries of music, which the musicians themselves are doing," Scelsa told the *Upsala Gazette* in 1969, "so that there is no longer anything called jazz, folk, or classical. It's all being molded together. So that a record by a 'new progressive rock group' may be influenced by the music of Bach. It may be influenced by the Indian music of Ravi Shankar. It may be influenced by old ragtime music. ...

"The next step is to break down the boundaries of block programming in radio... you just program all the music together and you let one piece of music add to another piece of music... you play something by Bach and then you play 'Eleanor Rigby' by the Beatles because there a similarity between the two of them." By then, the station reached—according to a contemporary estimate by Scelsa—around 60,000 listeners. Other DJs included Lou "The Duck" D'Antonio and Danny Fields, a Warhol associate who later helped sign the MC5 and the Stooges to major label contracts. (An incident illustrating Iggy Pop's 1969 visit to FMU is depicted in their Great Moments in WFMU History trading card set with the title "Raw Power All Over Scelsa's Shoes.")

"Since music is such a big part of the revolution," Scelsa observed to interviewer C. Dubois, "it's going to take on any of the characteristics that the revolution takes on." ("I think that it is going to be a revival of, like, good time rock and roll," Scelsa, who hosts the long-running *Idiot's Delight*, currently on New York's WFUV, guessed astutely.) But, the revolution being what it was, six months later, Scelsa and D'Antonio—allegedly fearing administration takeover and the demise of the counterculture—shut down FMU in August 1969. Ten months after that, the station was back on the air, in the words of one account, "experimenting with tape loops, political speeches, and six-day marathon readings of *The Lord of the Rings*."

Attending high school five miles away in Maplewood, teenager Irwin Chusid was aware of WFMU, and even ended up at the station's fabled Old Yeller house during their 1969 marathon. Tuning into the station back in 1974, Chusid "couldn't believe how awful it was."

"I mean, it was just atrocious," he says. "What I heard on FMU were a bunch of guys in the studio at once, four or five guys with one mic. One of the guys would be on the mic and he'd be carrying on a conversation with other people in the room, but you couldn't hear what they were saying. You just heard, 'yeah, so, what'd you think of that concert we went to last weekend?'

"'Helwjekwhehe.'

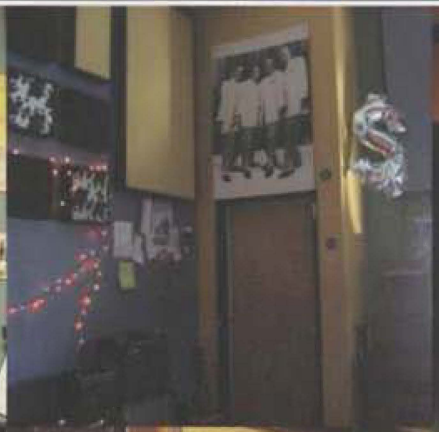
"'Yeah, yeah remember?'

"And then, 'youhdlhdsa.' It was like that. A lot of that. It was embarrassing. The music they were playing was, for the part, progressive rock of the period, album-oriented rock, whatever you want to call it. I wasn't hearing much jazz, or folk, or oldies, or classical. It was just, y'know, a lot of synth rock, dance music like, I dunno, Todd Rundgren's Utopia and Nectar and Genesis and maybe Hawkwind and Van der Graff Generator and Gong. Which in and of itself could be fine, but there wasn't any sort of mix."

Thanks to station manager Bruce Longstreet, whose last act before stepping down was to name Chusid a DJ, Irwin went on the air at WFMU in February 1975. "I was committed to taking advantage of programming liberty from the start," he says. "In fact, many of the artists I played in 1975, I still air: Harry Partch, Martin Denny, children's records, Miles Davis, Ken Nordine, Mose Allison, scratchy 78s, Leonard Cohen, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Robert Wyatt, Thelonious Monk, found audio artifacts, obscurities, oddities, and abnormalities. I disregarded categories and dispensed with consistency. The show was programmed in real-time, with no advance planning. I did longer monologues and read articles and short stories on the air, and hosted the occasional live guest."

Besides the beloved Lou "The Duck" D'Antonio (Irwin: "a brilliant broadcaster and a wonderful man"), the only holdover from

ANGEL
FOOD!



ON
AIR
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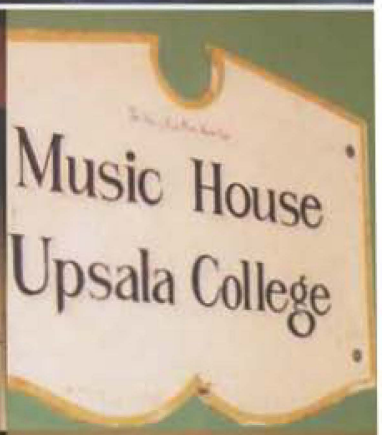
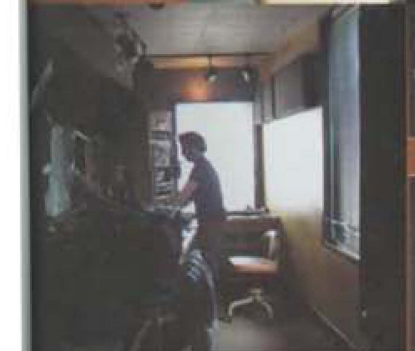
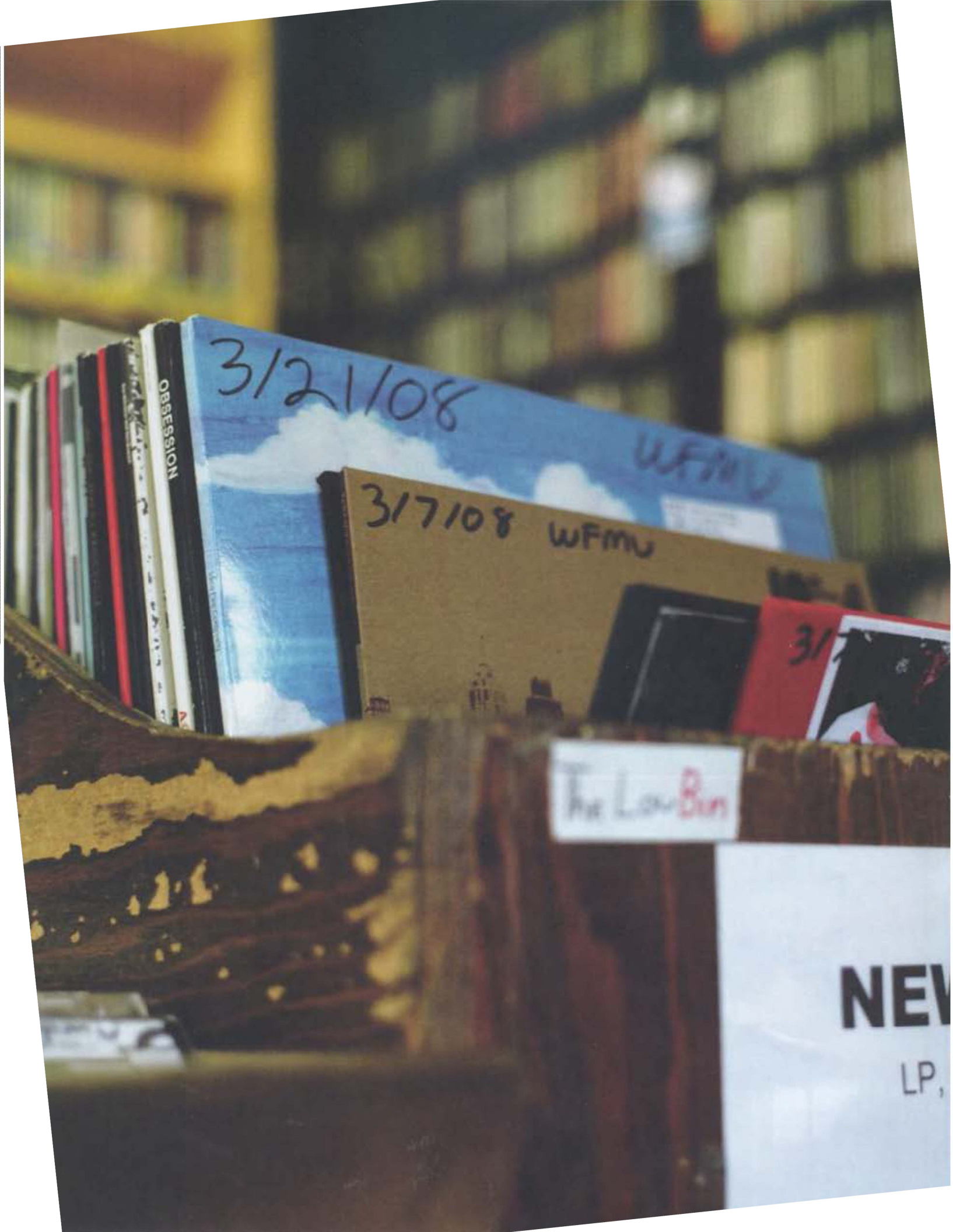

Music House
Upsala College



FLOYD CRAMER


3/21/08
OBSESSION
3/7/08 WFMU
The Low Burn
NEW
LP,

the station's original crew, Chusid thought it time for another revolution. Despite resistance, Chusid went into what he later described as "pre-emptive propaganda mode—get to new staff before old staff got to them." He distributed memos. In one, written in June 1978, he wrote, that "it behooves me to scream out once and for all what free-form radio—in fact, what the medium of radio itself—is not. It is not Music, however varied and intelligently programmed. Radio, especially of the free-form variety, certainly includes music. But contrary to what 'progressive' radio folk would have you believe, there isn't much creativity in just playing recorded music. Any laboratory ape can do it with varying degrees of appeal."

By 1980—with the addition of R. Stevie Moore (a hugely prolific underground musician in his own right), Jim Price, and other comrades—Chusid estimates the station was "half and half." Ken Freedman, aged 26, hair not yet white, arrived in February 1983.

Like the hallways of WFMU, there is much ephemera hanging around Ken Freedman's office whose symbolism invite the eyes and mind to linger. An image of a gravestone with the word "genre" etched into it hangs next to his desk. There's a Montgomery Burns head pinned to the door. An appropriated postal box overflows with wigs.

Celebrating his own quarter-century with the station, Freedman came from Highland Park, New Jersey via Ann Arbor's freeform student outfit, WCBN, where he was program director. A year-and-a-half later, WFMU's general manager resigned. Freedman applied, and got the job. During his first week, lightning hit the transmitter and knocked the station off the air for 10 days. He brought on new DJs, and instituted a program guide, *LCD (Lowest Common Denominator)* in 1986, featuring illustrated programming grids, dispatches from Irwin and the gang, and graphics from the station's listening community of artists, including Gary Panter, Peter Bagge, and Jim Woodring. (Among WFMU's first modern ephemera, *The Best of LCD* was collected in an anthology published by Princeton Architectural Press last year.)

Even though there was virtually no relation between the college and the station, the studios were still housed in the basement of Froeberg Hall, as they had been since 1971. "When you go to FMU in the basement of a dormitory, you're passing all these vestiges of student life that you're not part of," Chusid remembers. "There are students there who don't know who you are and don't care, they don't listen to the station. You kind of feel like you're walking into someone else's property and that you don't quite belong there, and then you [go] into the radio station and you're in this little enclave."

In September 1989, the station moved two blocks away, to 580 Springdale Avenue and what became known as the Avatar House. While the station's listening community solidified, so did their on-air social circle. "When we were in the house, it was like, 'Wow, we can sit out on the lawn! We can have a barbecue out back! We shovel the driveway when it snows!'" Chusid remembers. "It was a home. We had keys to the front door. People would sleep there. You'd go there and hang out, much more than you did at Froeberg Hall. FMU became a warmer place to be and more of a community."

"It was like the Delta House," Brian Turner remembers. There were records under the sink in the bathroom, and a natty mattress upstairs in case DJs missed the last bus out. No bands, though. Too many rare records and groovy pieces of unguarded equipment.

Though they didn't frequently invite them to crash, WFMU pulled young bands into their orbit (such as the roommates of new DJ Gaylord Fields, Yo La Tengo's Ira Kaplan and Georgia Hubley), championed Texan weirdoes like Jandek and Daniel Johnston (who famously sang with Yo La Tengo over the phone from his parents' home in West Virginia), and undertook an approach to programming that bordered on scholarly. Anchored by Chusid—whose tireless work resulted in the distribution of music by the Shaggs, Raymond Scott, and the Langley Schools Music Project—the station's cult only grew more knotted.

"FMU has something that a lot of stations don't," Chusid notes, "especially what a lot of non-commercial stations don't have. It has a recognizable identity, it has a personality. When you listen for a while, and you get a sense that there are a lot of inside jokes that you might not get at first, but—after a while—you realize when they're referring to Andy Breckman or [his call-in show with Freedman] *Seven Second Delay*. You begin to realize that this is the FMU subculture, this is the FMU framework. And that draws you in because they're references you simply don't hear anywhere else.

"There is a sense of identity, a sense of humor. You can read it on the website, you can hear it in the programming. And a lot of that humor and identity emanates from Ken Freedman. Ken is very unique in that respect. Ken has really put his imprint on the station more than any single human being. And he's a control freak. Ken doesn't easily delegate responsibility, and that's what makes him sick."

WFMU has, if nothing else, benefited from Freedman's sickness and its side effects of frequent responsibility. When Upsala College went bankrupt in 1994, Freedman organized the creation of Auricle Communications, a non-profit group of DJs and other FMU community members. With the $150,000 Freedman and company forked over—from an anonymous listener, paid back by an emergency pledge

"Contrary to what 'progressive' radio folk would have you believe, there isn't much creativity in just playing recorded music. Any laboratory ape can do it with varying degrees of appeal." Irwin Chusid, in a 1978 studio memo.

drive—Upsala filled their last payroll, shut their doors, and abandoned WFMU on a dead campus. It was around then that Freedman's hair turned white.

"It was weird but I kind of still remember it kind of fondly, and I think everybody kind of remembers that period kind of fondly," Freedman says of their time alone on the campus. "I think it was weird, and dangerous. There was a lot of crime, a lot of fucked up things happening. You know, people getting mugged, people's cars getting vandalized, people's cars getting stolen, band's cars getting stolen from the front of the station. Attempted break-ins, shoot-outs between the cops and some drug dealers that ended on our front lawn. Gunfire way off on the abandoned campus, you know?"

Before the college chaplain—a friend and neighbor to the station—moved out, he bequeathed Freedman a collection of five paintings on black velvet. "I thought you might like these," he told Freedman, passing over a vamperella, "a bizarre nude," and a Star Wars infringement. Four years later, following more fundraisers, WFMU purchased its current home, a former EPA headquarters, in downtown Jersey City. They brought Freedman's collection of velvet paintings, too.

"We had the request for the A-side of a 45," Yo La Tengo's Ira Kaplan announces midway through his band's 13th marathon appearance, playing requests for pledges. Their "bar mitzvah year," they call it. "We only know the B-side," Kaplan says.

If WFMU can come off as a community of elitist music dork aesthetes, it should be remembered that they are only a community because they are all missing information themselves and excited to share what they have. Kaplan, no slouch when it comes to rock knowledge, later says that his recent fill-in DJ slots have been "intimidating." "In any category, there's stuff I like, but there's someone here who knows everything more than I do.

"I co-hosted with Michael Shelley and told him I was very excited because on his [Marathon] premium, I actually own one of the songs. Yes! 1 for 33! I can't hope for a better percentage than that." There is overlap, of course, but that's exactly what makes it a community. Gaylord Fields leads off Yo La Tengo's portion of the evening with Dudley Moore's "Love Me," a song which coincidentally Kaplan had used to leadoff his own pledge slot.

It is not a perfect chaos. Turner produces a recent playlist that includes Sri Lankan sensation M.I.A. and Brooklyn noise heroes Talibam!, but mostly seems to be made up of Sublime Frequencies' geo-political dispatches and, er, psychedelic reissues. "I think that's a bit of a problem," Freedman admits, though—given FMU's diversity—it likely doesn't take all too many spins to achieve majority. Though Freedman and Turner sometimes attempt to address problems (when Laura Cantrell went on maternity leave, there was "a twang deficit"), the current scope of FMU-brand freeform still doesn't include much hip-hop or urban music, and there's a profound amount of vintage garage rock. So it goes. One could still listen for days and never hear something familiar.

Even Freedman says that, "if I just turned it on, I could not name either the song or the artist 90% of the time, probably. 10% of the time I could tell, maybe 20%." And, that, in a sense, is the dialogue, which continues among the DJs, both on the air and off, in the DJ lounge, where personal lockers each feature a favorite LP cover slid into the plexiglass fronts (ranging from *Ya Gotta Believe!*, in celebration of the 1973 Mets, to a cha-cha record illustrated by *Mad* visionary Don Martin). In addition to Freedman's collections, the station walls are a hieroglyphic maze of other detritus, from in-joke tags ("the Andy Zax/Lisa Jane Persky Studio Door") to simple chore sheets (reminding, say, Gaylord Fields to "move dry dishes from dish rack to cabinet").

It is a conversation that extends to the audience, through the live comments columns of DJ playlists, and—most especially—WFMU's Beware of the Blog!, launched by Freedman in 2005. There, the stations' fans frequently themselves contribute postings, under bylines affixed with the honorific "Listener," like Comrade or Brother. The gesture goes along nicely with Freedman's collection of propaganda posters, which surely inspired the recent WFMU pledge drive premium in which an old-style microphone casts a shadow in the shape of the Statue of Liberty's torch. "Freedom... is freeform," it reads.

There is a line, of course, between those on the air and those off of it, but not between DJs and the listening community. They, like the listeners who man tables at the record fairs, or the 125 volunteers handled by Scott Williams during the Marathon weeks, are unpaid. Since the station is unaffiliated with any college, there is little turnover among FMU DJs (who'd wanna quit?). One way to sort the WFMU Airwave Idols Trading Cards, issued as a marathon premium a few years back, is by the "on air at WFMU since" stat. A good quarter of the deck comes from the '80s or before, with another half seemingly behind the mic for a decade or longer.

The only person who cops to knowing "a lot" of the music on the air is Brian Turner, who is in charge of stocking the station's vaunted New Bin. His concise monthly summations of the albums, intended for DJs and uploaded sporadically to WFMU.org since 1999, are as usable a guide to the past decade of experimental music as one is likely to find. "Consider this band that does drum & bass, with actual drums and bass," he wrote of an early Lightning Bolt single. "This 7" sounds like it was recorded on Pluto."

"I'd say about half the New Bin, maybe even more like 60%, is stuff that I've written away for specifically because I read about it or heard about it somewhere and wanted the station to have it," says Turner, who rotates in 100 new items a week, which will stay for around two-and-a-half months.

"I'm on the internet all day. I listen to a lot of stations that I like online and make notes and check their playlists, specific DJs I really like. I read all the new release weekly postings from distributors, read tons of blogs. I have them all marked by a hierarchy and kind of check them out daily or weekly or monthly. I get a lot of magazines. I think my biggest source of discovering stuff is just having built a network over ten years of people who I implicitly trust that feed me things and I feed them things, back and forth." (Two recent raves: The Reveries, a Toronto improv trio whose members broadcast their music to cell phone receivers dangling in each other's mouths, and *Arcade Ambience*, a collection of 1980s field recordings made in bleeping video game parlors.)

Located next to Freedman's office at the top of the kitsch-lined spiral stairs, past the Hamish Kilgour-painted rotunda, Turner's space is as one might expect. Just as Freedman comes off as ultra-responsible, Turner seems more like an overgrown, hoodie-wearing undergrad. Cassettes spill from a shower basket, old record shelves overflow with new media, and a file cabinet is covered with bumper stickers from fellow travelers at California's Amoeba Records and *Arthur* magazine. There is also a cooler filled with effects pedals.

"Sometimes, it's just sensory overload," says Turner, looking around the station. "There's so much propaganda and colors blaring and toys everywhere. I try to be very minimal at home."

Though WFMU clings to the artifacts of the pre-internet world in much the same way that academics cherish the primacy of the published text, they—perhaps more than any other radio station—knew what to do when they saw they arrival of the digital age. Ken Freedman did more than embrace the internet, he let the station be enveloped by it.

"We have so much more access now to isolated communities of weirdoes, you know?" Turner says. "We play so much stuff from San Francisco now, just because we've been in touch with so many people that listen to us there. Portland, Austin, London. Listeners in Turkey just emailed me a package of stuff. It seems like the people that get us really get us, and know exactly what to send, know how to sort of tickle us back, and it's great!"

"FMU is looking at ourselves more as a content provider for streams than just a radio station," Freedman declares. "I think that all radio stations have to think of themselves as

stream providers more than radio providers. Whether that stream is text, or pictures, or movies, or radio. The stream that will always remain our top priority is FMU proper. Again, that's the challenge, remaking FMU as an overall stream provider of different types of content than just a single radio station provider."

"The internet [listenership] has expanded since it began," Freedman says, "but it's actually been flat for us for a number of years, while the number of FM listeners has actually been dropping. For the last few years, between FM dropping and the internet growing more slowly than it was for years, [the total listeners have] just been kind of holding steady." At the moment, it is almost exactly half and half.

"The challenge for us, I think, is adapting, which we're certainly doing a better job of than any other radio station. It's adapting to that while still preserving what's been so great about FMU, and trying to marry the two." Indeed, a glance through even a day's worth of entires on Beware of the Blog will reveal songs, musicians, and news covered almost nowhere else around the blogosphere (except when people link back to WFMU.org). One imagines that WFMU's Free Music Archive—being overseen by longtime employee Liz Berg with a grant from former New York Governor's Eliot Spitzer's payola settlements with the major labels—will follow a similarly unique aesthetic.

"It's still just so much more expensive to run a big, active website," Freedman says, of the challenges facing WFMU as they maintain their relevance in the 21st century. "It's still very precarious," he reiterates, aware of the lofty million-dollar goal he has set for the 50th anniversary marathon.

"I don't think our listeners realize quite how precarious it is because I think that we've created fatigue in terms of how bad things are. It's very, very hard for us to do what we're trying to do and only fundraise once a year. But we're committed. I just feel that's a really, really critical line not to cross. It's been very, very hard for us to raise enough money, and we haven't been raising enough money, but there's other things that I think everybody would prefer to do before we ever started fundraising more than once a year." Art auctions will commence sometime this year. In the meantime, it is up to the Hoof 'n' Mouth Sinfonia for the final lunge towards the million dollars.

"Doug Yule is the genius in that band," Irwin Chusid says from behind one of WFMU's two house drum kits, taking a break from rehearsing the Velvet Underground's "All Tomorrow's Parties."

"I once got beat up for saying John Cale was more important than Lou Reed," guitarist and bandleader Scott Williams offers. Rehearsing in what is normally the station's main studio for their eighth year backing up DJs and staff members in a night of obscurantist karaoke to close out the Marathon, the rotating band has 39 songs to get through. Again, it is a relief to know that not even Chusid, in the maw of new music for over 30 years, knows all of them.

"Play dumber," someone suggests to Chusid before they start again.

This year, they will go public, broadcasting live from the backroom at Maxwell's in a blowout finale. Gaylord Fields arrives to plan his performance of "The Intro & the Outro," the side B leadoff from the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band's *Gorilla*. It is the type of joke WFMU loves, structured as an in-studio gag with Neil Innes and company introducing a never-ending *Sgt. Pepper*'s cover's worth of special guests. The Hoof 'n' Mouthers plan to begin their live broadcast by mirroring the Bonzos' camp-psych silliness. "Digging General de Gaulle on accordion," the Bonzos announce typically, inserting familiar asides and canned studio dialogue. "Rather wild, General! Thank you, sir. Roy Rogers on Trigger. Tune in Wild Man of Borneo on bongos. Count Basie Orchestra on triangle."

"It's too bad Yo La Tengo are on tour, or we could have Ira Kaplan for the line 'over there, Eric Clapton, ukulele,'" somebody ponders, as they figure out where FMU staffers fit in with the gag. "'And looking very relaxed, Adolf Hitler on vibes,'" somebody calls out. "Who's Hitler?"

"Ken," somebody, probably multiple people, reply without missing a beat.

In the end, Freedman doesn't take the stage with the Hoof 'n' Mouth until later, the part of Hitler played by DJ PGB. The DJs line up on Maxwell's floor, dressed in all manners of pageantry, as Fields calls them up one by one and they push the Hoof 'n' Mouthers further and further back. One woman hands me her hat so she can go onstage in one role, exchanges it for another a minute later, and marches back onstage. It is the magic of radio in full effect. The station is, as usual, amid crisis. Morning host Nachum Segal—whose 6-to-9 AM slot with its massive Jewish audience makes up FMU's only noticeably factionalized block—has lost his rabbi father, whose car tragically slipped into the Hackensack River during a storm. The same weather system, in turn, knocked the station's East Orange transmitter off the air during Glen Jones' show. And, on top of it, they are still short on money.

It doesn't stop anybody from partying like it's 1999, though. Chris Stubbs, dressed as a flower child, sings a falsetto "Hocus Pocus" by Focus, grabbing his balls on the high notes. Liz Berg delivers a charming take of "How You Do Now" by German GI-poppers, the Monks. Maybe the Beatles didn't really live together, but the 24/7 community of WFMU seems to have approximated it. From the stage, Freedman calls it "the greatest cult anyone could hope to join."

As it turns out, the station doesn't make the million-dollar mark, though they come within $20,000 of doing so. And, as Freedman points out, still make more than any previous marathon. So, at 1:12 in the morning, when Maxwell's staff is eager to shut the place down for the night, they wearily prepare to sign off.

"Do you want to know who the final pledger that we're going thank during the 2008 Marathon is?" Freedman asks enthusiastically. "It's Dennis, from Three Oaks, Michigan!" Freedman thanks lots of other people. "By rights and tradition, the Marathon ends when the gong has been hit," he announces. "This is WFMU East Orange, WXHD Mount Hope, WFMU-dot-org. Whoever's back in Jersey City, you can fade out the gong whenever there's no trace of the gong left." The gong sounds. There is a cheer, a rumble, decay, some random bar noise, and then nothing. But then there is more freeform. Specifically, disco-funk, beginning with T-Connection, doing "Do What You Wanna Do" from 1977's *Magic*, and WFMU continues merrily along. ●

Jesse Jarnow wrote about Yo La Tango in STN#30